

INTRODUCTION:

The significance of "marching orders"

Marching orders must always be simple and clear.

The marching orders of Jesus are very easy to understand. They have only two words: "FOLLOW ME."

This is his call to discipleship.

They are repeated at least four times in the Gospel of Mark alone.

The word "disciples" appears in at least 41 verses in Mark.

A disciple is a learner, pupil, or follower of Jesus.

I. THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP:

A. Examples:

1. Simon and Andrew, 1:16ff)
2. James and John, 1:19ff)
3. Levi, 2:14ff
4. The Twelve, 3:13ff
5. The rich man, 10:21.

see 8:34

B. Common elements in each instance of these calls to follow Jesus:

1. The initiative in the call is always that of Jesus.

He calls, and people respond with a "yes" or "no."

The moment of decision can't be delayed, and a response is demanded.

But the call CAN be REJECTED.

2. The call comes unexpectedly and without preparation -- "out of the blue."

Jesus suddenly appears on the scene, extends his call, and people follow immediately. Neutrality doesn't seem possible.

3. It is a call to intimate relationship with Jesus.

II. THE TEACHING ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP.

A. The disciples are expected to have inner knowledge about God's rule in this world, but they do not.

Often the disciples fail to measure up to what Jesus expects of them..

Often he instructs them privately (4:10, 34) but they fail to grasp this message.

Often he rebukes them for their lack of understanding.

B. The disciples are expected to have new insight born of their faith, but they do not.

Jesus said, "Do you still have no faith?"

Their real problem of faith is that they did not yet understand who Jesus was, and this infected all of their views.

They said, "Who then is this?" (4:41)

Jesus rebuked them for their dullness of their minds and their hardness of hearts.

On three separate occasions (8:31ff; 9:30ff, 10:22ff) he tried to teach them that he was going to suffer and die, but they didn't accept this.

C. Disciples are expected to be servants of their fellow man, but they are not.

Once Jesus asked the disciples (6:37) to feed the 5,000, but they did not do it. He asked them to cast out demons, but they couldn't (9:18). They were more concerned with their own prestige and position. They quarreled about who would be the greatest. They requested favored positions in the kingdom.

D. Disciples are expected to be filled with love and compassion, but they are not.

When children are brought to Jesus for him to touch them, the disciples do not allow it. Jesus became angry with the disciples and intervened and blessed the children.

Once a blind man came to Jesus and cried out for mercy, but the disciples silenced him.

Their lack of sensitivity to human need is in total contrast to the warm concern of Jesus.

E. Disciples are expected to be faithful, but they are not.

Judas betrayed him, Peter denied him, and all the rest of the disciples fled from him and left him alone in his darkest hour.

The three most faithful ones went to sleep on him in Gethsemane.

III. WHAT DOES ALL THIS TEACH US ABOUT THE NATURE OF DISCIPLESHIP?

It is emphasized so much in the gospels, there must be some special theological significance to it.

I believe that Mark and the other gospel writers want us to understand that discipleship and failure are not mutually exclusive.

A. To follow Jesus does not mean perfection.

Dedication to Jesus Christ does not automatically eliminate the old ways of thought, the old views about God, or wrong evaluations about what is important in this world.

It does mean that we as disciples of Christ are accepted as we are, in spite of the fact that we remain painfully aware of our own failures.

A wonderful part of the good news of the gospel is that Jesus accepts disciples as they are, called to be with him, to learn from him, to grow under his teaching, and to serve him with what we are.

B. Although discipleship is a call to a new way of life, the disciple does not have to wait until he is wholly new to begin his service.

We come to Jesus now, and follow him now, just as we are.

Disciples are not called to be strong heroes of the faith.

Rather, they are called to accept their own failure, to accept themselves as they really are--weak human beings who continue to fail, but who keep on walking with Jesus. This should encourage us not to lose heart when we fail.

The betrayal by Judas:

You see, the problem with Judas was that when he failed, ~~he was ashamed~~, but he gave up hope and went and hanged himself. But Judas didn't need to hang himself. The story didn't need to end that way. It could have been different.

Suppose after he had returned the thirty pieces of silver, that he had gone back to Jesus and dropped to his knees, put his arms around the feet of Jesus, and sobbed.

He wouldn't need to say a word.

Jesus would have put his hand on Judas' head, and in an instant he would have said, "Judas, thy sins be forgiven thee. Get up.

I'm going to call the other disciples in.

I've got a big job for all of you to do.

I want you twelve men to take the story of the kingdom of God to the world."

That's the way it might have been; that's the way it SHOULD have been. That's the way it might be for every one of us when we fail him.

What we need to do when we fail him is to come back and fall at his feet.

Even if we don't say a word, he'll understand. But we need to keep on following him.

That one step could be the difference between eternal doom and eternal life.

Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost;

and he is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

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Recently in one of our comics - I think it was Hi & Lois - a neighbor said to Hi, "What is your doctor like?" Hi answered, "He's okay. Why, you need a checkup?" To which the neighbor replied, "Yeah, I'm looking for a doctor who drinks, smokes and is overweight!"

Which reminds me that too many church members look for a preacher who doesn't set standards that are too high, and doesn't provide an example too challenging, and doesn't preach against pet sins that are so attractive!